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ABSTRACT

This paper examines three ways in which attempts at program evaluation are most often thwarted The first, fingerpointing, may be either positive or negative. It may be positive by pointing to the individual who is "doing a good job considering--", it may be threatening by expecting too much of any one individual (e.g. "Evaluation should be made in terms of the project, not the project coordinator"). A second way to thwart effective evaluation is by asserting that progress is "in the pipeline"--that is, those benefits currently visible are meager compared to long-range benefits as yet unseen. The third way to thwart evaluation is by resorting to "tunnel vision", wherein every criticism meets with a character testimonial (e.g. "I'm doing all I can") intended to make the problems disappear. After examining and analyzing each postulation, the author offers ways in which each can be used positively. (CKJ)

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TITLE

EVALUATING THROUGH COUNTING LEARNER BENEFITS

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DATE

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EVALUATING THROUGH

COUNTING LEARNER BENEFITS

It is not a new idea to start evaluation programs by counting learner benefits.

However, it is unusual to come up with a learner benefit count that avoids any of the following three criticisms:

> I don't mind your attempt at evaluation BUT I will not tolerate your pointing the finger at me!
>
> I realize you can't see any immediate impact BUT rest easy because eventual success is in the pipeline!
>
> I can understand your concern about immediate student benefits BUT you've got to realize that I'm doing all I can!!!

In the eyes of the above respondents, any attempt at evaluation by counting learner benefits has been effectively blocked by the three comments cited. After all, each of the above respondents will come back with, "Even Winston Churchill could not do a better job given the present crisis."

With all due respect to the late English prime minister, the following approach to evaluation starts off with the sematically acceptable term STUDENT BENEFITS and presents a workable evaluation system that can stimulate practical self-evaluation techniques.

FINGERPOINTING, IN THE PIPELINE, AND TUNNEL VISION

The last time I spoke to someone about the above three topics, I was brought up sharp by a violent reaction.

> Look, fellow, you're pointing the finger at me.
>
> You're trying to fix responsibility upon me, an individual, for an institutional shortcoming and failure.
>
> The evaluation should be made in terms of the project, not in terms of the project coordinator.
>
> I'm doing all I can, and now you're asking for more work, more paperwork, and more data.
>
> How can you expect me to have a measurable and significant impact upon students in such a short time?
>
> I should be left alone so I can concentrate on forging the basic links of cooperation that ties things together. Then, we can start looking for visible immediate results.
>
> If you want testimonials or character witnesses, I will provide them. However, don't expect me to dig up a teenage fan club.
>
> You seem to imply that I lack administrative ability when what I lack is an administrative team. I'm the only one assigned to this project.

As is obvious from the honesty and sincerity of the above comments, fingerpointing is no way to conduct an intensive evaluation. Implied "ship up or shape up" evaluation policies are much too threatening to help increase specific performance measures of a project, institution, or program.

In the pipeline is where most of progress lies. This means that certain benefits that can be counted today are insignificant in comparison to the long range benefits envisioned by a carefully thought out project. Long term results do not pop up overnight.

Tunnel vision refers to unnecessarily limited horizons. The manager who meets every criticism with, "I'm doing all I can," is forgetting that bitter critics and major troubles won't go away upon receipt of a character witness type of testimonial. Even though no one else is added to the payroll, more people are needed on the team.

After asserting that he was doing all he could, one administrator added, "Even Winston Churchill would have difficulty winning this battle."

The following paragraphs will explore fingerpointing, in the pipeline, tunnel vision, and Winston Churchill type solutions in order to point up specific evaluation directions.

FINGERPOINTING

Sometimes, fingerpointing is done in a positive vein:

> Our coordinator is doing a good job considering the short time he has been here.
>
> Our project director already has so much work that expecting him to come in direct contact with students would be ridiculous. He is doing all he can right now.
>
> His credentials, his testimonials, his letters of recommendations, and his previous success convince us that this person is the right man for the right job at the right time.
>
> I've seen him in operation. It's a one man show, and a good one man show.
>
> We hired him with a specific job description. He's living up to that job description, and even surpassing it in many instances.

Obviously, the positive type of fingerpointing as illustrated above is appreciated by anyone being evaluated. This type of fingerpointing reinforces good activities performed by anyone called upon to direct, coordinate, plan, and manage anything, any program, any project, any institution, or any organization.

Recently, three organizations were studied in order to find out how evaluation could go beyond fingerpointing.

For each organization, a study was made of the rationale, the objectives, the activities, and the evaluation criteria developed locally.

From the point of view of fingerpointing, it can be definitively asserted that:

> The rationale POINTED THE FINGER at a host of needs, problems, symptoms, statistics, areas of concern, and priorities that needed to be attacked. In every case, it was asserted that no one person is responsible for all this mess.

The objectives of the project or program POINTED THE FINGER at certain specific job responsibilities that were to be given to one person.

The activities portion of the proposal POINTED THE FINGER at certain activities that had to be done immediately, in the next month, on a regular basis, and at specifically stated deadlines. After a while, the activities section began to resemble an effort to prove that the new man hired for the new job was not simply going to put in time doing nothing. In this effort to justify the job description, every possible spare moment was accounted for by one activity or another.

As far as the evaluation criteria were concerned, the proposal POINTED THE FINGER at the obvious fact that anybody who lived up to the job description, the objectives, and the activities was thereby beyond any reproach. Some proposals went on to list even more doable activities that would pinpoint an extra-ordinary degree of success in any incumbent.

Fingerpointing is a phenonenom, not merely something to be ignored.

If any fingerpointing is to be done, it is to be done to the entire program, project, or institution, and not to an isolated individual.

Look at the following three column format entitled, GLOBAL FINGERPOINTING WORKSHEET.

In the first column, list objectives, job descriptions, activities, and evaluation criteria that are in writing as an integral part of whatever you are doing.

In the second column, try to translate these doable activities into countable results that are youth-centered, student-centered, highly visible, and significant.

In the third column, list places where success is to be publicized.

This worksheet will force each individual to translate individual-centered activities into youth and student results that are worth doing and worth bragging about.

It is obvious that news media, whether public or local, do not accept everything that is offered. Whenever a source of publicity is listed, the person submitting this information must constantly ask the question, "Will the severe publicity criteria of the publishing agency or media accept this data as relevant, objective, and worthwhile?"

GLOBAL FINGERPOINTING
WORKSHEET

Yardsticks that are	Countable results that are	Places Where Success Is To Be Publicized
a) Objectives b) Job Descriptions c) Activities d) Evaluation Criteria	1) Youth-centered 2) Student-centered 3) Highly Visible 4) Significant	

Now that the reader has had a chance to try out this attempt at global fingerpointing, it is worthwhile to look at a generalized example.

The generalized example on the following page should not be considered an answer key. After all, local problems and situations are so unique and complex that no one overalll answer will work under every circumstance.

The general idea is to:

1. Accept existing objectives, job descriptions, activities, and evaluation criteria as unalterable constraints.

2. Translate these unalterable constraints -- that are not subject to change -- into countable results that are youth-centered, student-centered, highly visible, and significant.

3. Place these results in a position where public examination is possible and helpful.

It must be understood that when existing objectives, job descriptions, activities, and evaluation criteria are declared unalterable, this is a statement of present fact rather than of future possibility. After all, the basic rule of program management is HAVE A PLAN AND STICK TO IT.

Changing horses in the middle of the stream, giving up and starting all over again, and playing it by ear are no way to run an organization that is trying to make a predetermined impact.

Of course, there is always the possibility that one year's experience will lead to SERIOUS AND DELIBERATE REVISIONS of the program, project, or proposal for next year. This is well and good, but in the case of contracts, legally funded operations, and categorical subventions, there is a legal limit to how much can be changed at any one time without a major intervention from higher authority.

GLOBAL FINGERPOINTING
WORKSHEET

Yardsticks that are	Countable results that are	Places Where Success Is To Be Publicized
a) Objectives b) Job Descriptions c) Activities d) Evaluation Criteria	1) Youth-centered 2) Student-centered 3) Highly Visible 4) Significant	
a) Change the community attitude from negative or neutral to positive. b) Be the person representing the project who assumes public responsibility. c) Inform the public through the news media of what is happening. d) Keep records of and make reports on what is going on, being done, and achieved.	1) Last year, 100 youths signed up for an interview. This year with the program, 275 youths signed up. 2) Last year, 10% dropped out of grade 12; there was no alternative program. This year, 3% dropped out and 12% went into the alternative program. 3) Last year, 15 of our students were arrested. This year, 5 were arrested. Not a single student in the alternative program was arrested. 4) Judging by public reaction, people who never voluntered for anything are digging in and helping the alternative program.	Immediate Supervision Newspaper TV School Newspaper Radio Bulletin Boards Meetings Parents Staff Government Agencies Civic Organizations

IN SUMMARY, fingerpointing can be used if the finger is pointed at the right object. The right object is not an individual, but an institution. The part of the institution that needs to be benefited is not so much the staff as the clients, youth, and students served therein.

IN THE PIPELINE

Once the basic orientation of fingerpointing has achieved a mental and practical emphasis on student-centered results, it is necessary to distinguish between LONG RANGE and SHORT RANGE results.

Short range results are things that can be identified immediately as benefits, results, and success. Short range results respond to such imperatives as:

> Show me now!
> I want immediate results that go beyond superficial cosmetic changes.

Long range results go beyond quick solutions, fast counts, and first impressions to stress durable goods that will be worthwhile both today and tomorrow. In using the expression, "It's in the pipeline," the person responsible for the project is most likely 100% convinced of the lasting benefits of the project.

On the other hand, an outsider is likely to be skeptical. An outsider must be convinced by immediate results that something else worthwhile is going to happen later on.

One of the besy ways to convince a skeptical outsider is to have countable results that are publicized to a variety of publics.

After all, the skeptical outsider realizes that it's hard to fool all of the people all of the time.

If a wide number of publics, through a large number of medias each apply objective standards of acceptability to the evidence presented, even the most skeptical critic must conclude that something worthwhile is happening.

TUNNEL VISION

Obviously, tunnel vision is sometimes used to describe a psychological illness more properly termed monomania.

In the present article, tunnel vision is not used in such a psycho-analytical sense.

After all, there is nothing mentally ill about the person who suffers from tunnel vision in management.

As a management deficiency, tunnel vision refers to the fact that the program manager thinks, does, and values the project so much that everything else seems to fade away by comparison.

Just as no parent likes to have a child criticized, so too a project manager becomes defensive whenever a pet project, especially his project, is criticized or attacked.

When the criticism or attack seems to be unjustified, the tunnel vision takes over and itself seems to be a way of life.

A siege mentality in which no criticism is accepted is hardly a way to demonstrate that a project is producing measurable success in terms of the clients, youths, or students served.

When pressed to the wall, many victims of tunnel vision will say, "I'm doing all I can. After all, a HOLDING ACTION is the best possible. Later on, we will have GO TIME."

Many project managers are trapped by the fallacy of EXTERNAL ACTIVITY.

Many managers are forced to attend meetings, make presentations, talk to people, discuss the program, and be in the public eye.

After a while, they begin to feel like Winston Churchill who is remembered for his famous speeches.

They can even come back with the refrain, "Given my situation, even Winston Churchill would have trouble making it work."

This is true if Winston Churchill did nothing but give speeches and rely only upon his activities, but while he spoke, his team worked.

Great leaders have had teams behind them.

These teams must be based upon the organization and upon volunteers.

CONCLUSIONS

So far, three things have been examined: fingerpointing, in the pipeline, and tunnel vision.

From the analysis made of fingerpointing, it can be concluded that the proper object must be pinpointed. This means focusing on the scale of program, project, or institutional issues rather than on one individual.

After our analysis of things in the pipeline, it can be safely concluded that the testimonial of one individual -- even the person in charge -- must be supplemented by public revelation, public examination, and public acceptance that receives assurance of long range success with evidence of short range immediate progress.

After our examination of tunnel vision, it can be concluded that every individual in a position of responsibility must look beyond highly specified job descriptions in order to search out visible and evident benefits to clients, youths, and students.

Lest these conclusions remain speculative and theoretical, each reader is asked to try his hand at filling in the three columns provided on the page entitled, GLOBAL FINGERPOINTING WORKSHEET.